

The Dreamer: Remembering Dr. King

By Quincy D. Brown – January 15, 2018

There is little difference between an idealistic dreamer and visionary activist when both decide to act on their inspiration. Joseph, one of the Bible's most noteworthy dreamers, told his brothers two of his dreams.



The first of Joseph's dream was about sheaves of wheat bowing down to him. And if this wasn't enough, he told his second dream to his father about the Sun and Moon and eleven stars bowing down to him. The implication of both dreams was that Joseph surmised that his eleven brothers (represented by the sheaves and eleven stars) and his father and mother (represented by the Sun and Moon) would one day bow down to his authority.



Naturally, Joseph's father tried to correct his son's youthful naiveté. His brothers, however, were not as patient or versed in the delicate art of persuasion. Instead, they resented him and tried to beat "the stuff of his dreams" out of him. The thinking goes: What do you do about a younger sibling who has gotten out of line? What do you do about a little brother who dares to believe that he is equal to the eldest? What happens when a sibling begins to dream the impossible and their family doesn't approve of it?

Had not an assassin's bullet snuffed out his life prematurely, another noteworthy dreamer and visionary activist would have celebrated his 89th birthday this year.

Like Joseph, Dr. King was a dreamer. He saw what others could not see. He heard what others did not hear. He felt what others did not feel. Therefore, he did what others were not willing to do. Instead of wheat sheaves and celestial bodies bowing him, King dreamed about a day in our nation when "justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream."

And despite the current nostalgic temptation that seeks to don the mantle of superhuman prowess upon him, Martin Luther King, Jr. the dreamer like many of us, was utterly human. At best, Dr. King's life was a combination of opposites: a mixture of "finite disappointment' and 'infinite hope."

Rather than bask in the glory of some three to four hundred awards, including the coveted Noble Peace Prize, King ascribed to a servant-leader philosophy that emphasized the redemptive nature of unearned suffering. In fact, moments before his famous [1963 keynote address](#) in Washington D.C., the announcer introduced Dr. King as "the moral conscience of the nation."



While standing in the shadow of the Lincoln Memorial, King articulated his most prominent of beliefs. King's proclamation of "I still have a dream..." suggests that what began, as an eight-year-old child's naïve hope of entering a "white only" amusement park was now analogous to the nation's vocabulary of freedom and democracy.

Ironically, this vision 'for a perfect union' was also the beginning of a prophetic nightmare forcing America to address a series of perplexing questions: What do you do about an articulate, disenfranchised person and his quest for the American dream? What do you do to a person who dreams about equality and

the reversal of the entire social order—who talks about exalting valleys, leveling hills, and the straightening of crooked places?



We remember Dr. King for his "[I Have A Dream](#)" speech, but it was during a [speech to address the poor working conditions](#) of sanitation workers at the Charles Mason Temple in Memphis, TN that he was able to put "flesh" on the dream that ultimately fused belief and practice together. He stated, "We got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter now because I've been

to the mountaintop...like anybody, I would like to live a long life...but I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will..."

The life and legacy of Dr. King teach that "true peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice." Put another way, true peace or shalom is the union of opposites or the balancing of the mind of the idealistic dreamer through the use of logic/rhetoric and the "soul force" of the "drum major for justice" to inspire and mobilize the masses.



Dr. King was able to unite these somewhat opposing poles together. With his unflinching faith, Dr. King was ready "to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood/sisterhood." Perhaps publicly sharing these union of opposites is what eventually got King murdered.

In other words, King bore his soul to a divided nation who did not want to unite the opposites symbolized by Blacks and Whites, Northerners and Southerners, the upper and lower classes together and, so on.

It was as if, King decided that he was going to have integrity early in his life so that his inside (that is his core values and soul) was going to match his outside (his actions) and he challenged the rest of the country to follow his lead.

Due to the overwhelming price required to unite the opposites of a nation as seen through marches and sit-ins to "dramatize a shameful situation" which resulted in suffering and sacrifice, an assassin attempted to snuff out the flicker of hope that King had ignited through the public presentation of his dream.

On Nov. 2, 1983, President Ronald Reagan signed into law HR3706, the King holiday bill. Beginning in 1986, Martin Luther King Day — the first federal holiday honoring an African American — would be observed on the third Monday in January.



King was right when he said,

"...the most agonizing problems within our human experience is that few, if any, of us live to see our fondest hopes fulfilled." May our dreams continue to inspire justice to roll like waters as we make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.